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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to ascertain reasons why high school students who did or did not participate in cooperative education work part time during the school year. The research was based on two questions: (1) the opinions of Tennessee high school students about working part time during the school year; and (2) differences in the two groups of students' opinions about the effects of working part time during the school year. The Tennessee Secondary Students' Employment Survey consisted of demographic questions and 31 opinion items pertaining to high school students working. From the population of all public high school students in Tennessee, a randomly selected sample size of 382 students was established for each grade level 9-12. A total of 1,980 students responded with usable instruments. Both cooperative and noncooperative vocational working students felt part-time work helps students learn job skills, money and time management skills, and career decision making skills. Both groups felt that working part time while in high school would not help students improve their goals and school attendance. A comparison of mean ratings led to the conclusion that the enhancement of secondary education by students working part time was greater for those students in a formal cooperative vocational education program. (11 references) (NLA)

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# *ENHANCEMENT of SECONDARY EDUCATION for COOPERATIVE and NON COOPERATIVE STUDENTS THROUGH PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT*

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**Enhancement of Secondary Education**

**for Cooperative and Non Cooperative High School Students**

**Through Part-Time Employment**

## Introduction

Why are today's high school students increasingly turning to part-time employment during the school year? The specific reasons vary from student to student. Obviously, not all high school students participate in a formal cooperative vocational education program. Today's high school students seem to be seeking experiences beyond traditional offerings. The purpose of this study was to ascertain reasons why high school students, coop and non coop work part-time during the school year. The following research questions were formulated to help guide part of this research effort:

1. What are the opinions of Tennessee public high school students about working part-time during the school year?
2. Is there a difference in students' opinions about the effects of working part-time during the school year by those students who do and do not participate in formal cooperative vocational education?

Empirical data regarding Tennessee high school students holding part-time employment during the school year was limited. This paper is based on part from the findings of the comprehensive report, Students' and Parents' Perceptions About Working Part-Time During the School Year in Tennessee Public High Schools (McNelly, Mann, and Petty, 1990). Baseline information was established by this aforementioned study on a state-wide basis for both students and their parents. This paper is limited to the opinions of Tennessee high school students who were working part-time. The students were grouped into those participating in a formal cooperative vocational education program and those who were not.

## Related Literature Review

A comprehensive review of literature regarding students who work part-time during the school year was conducted and revealed the following generalizations:

1. Direct reports from youth are of significant value (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986).

2. Youths' attitudes toward work are not significantly different from those of older workers. There is no evidence that they possess and "immature" view of work (Andrisani, 1978).

3. Sixty percent of the high school students were working, and an additional twenty-five percent were looking for work but unable to find jobs (Borus, 1981).

4. The declining proportion of youth ages 16-19 in the general population has led to the need for some creative approaches by service and retail employers to attract youth (Bacas, 1986; Swasy, 1987).

5. Those who worked more while in high school also worked the most in the year following graduation, were unemployed less, and obtained more skill training while in the job compared with their non-working age mates (Miguel and Faulk, 1984).

6. Vocational students, especially males, are more likely to work longer hours than students in other high school programs. Working did not have any discernable effect on the academic performance of working vocational students (Desy, 1984).

7. Time spent at work is second only to time spent in class. Time spent at work was not spent at the expense of other important youth activities. The only group whose adolescent activities were compromised by work were seniors working more than the average number of hours (19.3) (Lewin-Epstein, 1981).

8. Students who did not work, and students who worked 20 hours or more spent approximately the same amount of time on homework and watching television (Lewin-Epstein, p. 54, 1981).

9. Cooperative vocational education develops positive work attitudes. Jobs associated with co-op programs are often different from the "typical" teen jobs in that a higher level of skill is often required and specific skill training is included (Baker, 1985).

10. The majority of the Tennessee employers, 92.1% of the respondents, indicated secondary schools should emphasize preparing for entry-level employment (McNelly, Pierce, and Blowers, 1990).

11. Tennessee employers desire entry-level employees to have prior work experience in a similar job, high school vocational education and cooperative education on-the-job training (Petty, McNelly, and Searle, 1989).

## Methodology

The Tennessee Secondary Students' Employment Survey (TSSES) was pilot tested and individual items were corrected from this investigation. The final TSSES consisted of demographic questions and 31 opinion items pertaining to high school students working. The instrument was determined to have an internal reliability estimate of .82.

From the population of all public high school students in Tennessee, a sample size of 382 students was established for each grade level 9-12. Tennessee high schools were randomly selected and random grade levels were assigned as determined by average daily attendance per school. All students from the randomly selected high schools were eligible. However, only the students working through vocational cooperative education programs and students not enrolled in cooperative education programs will be included in this paper.

Simple and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The simple statistics were frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations. The inferential statistics included linear regression which included a t-test to ascertain significant statistical differences.

## Findings

A total of 1,980 students responded with useable instruments. The numbers may vary due to non response on certain items. Demographics for the students may be found in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Student Demographics (N=1980)*

| Grade Level | N | % | Gender | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 437 | 22.1 | Female | 1097 | 55.9 |
| 10 | 388 | 19.6 | Male | 865 | 44.1 |
| 11 | 552 | 30.5 | | | |
| 12 | 603 | 30.5 | | | |

| Worked During School Year | N | % | Participated in Co-op Vocational Ed. | N** | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 1067 | 54.0 | Yes | 308 | 30.6 |
| No | 908 | 46.0 | No | 697 | 69.4 |

* Ns may very due to non response by students.

** Students who had not worked during the school year were not eligible to respond to this question.

Table 2

Participated in Cooperative Vocational Education Demographics (N=1012)*

| Gender by Participation in Cooperative Vocational Education | | Yes N | Yes % | No N | No % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | 171 | 55.5 | 366 | 52.5 |
| | Male | 137 | 44.5 | 331 | 47.5 |
| | Total | 308 | 100.0 | 697 | 100.0 |
| Location of High School by Participation in Cooperative Vocational Education | | | | | |
| | Rural | 190 | 61.3 | 386 | 55.0 |
| | Urban | 120 | 38.7 | 316 | 45.0 |
| | Total | 310 | 100.0 | 702 | 100.0 |

* Ns may vary due to non response by students.

### Comparing Cooperative and Non Cooperative Student Responses

Of the 31 opinion items on the TSSES, 25 were significantly different at the .05 or better level between the means of the working cooperative vocational education (co-op) students and the working non cooperative students. Please refer to Table 3 for an item-by-item listing. The opinion items of the TSSES had response categories and values of Strongly Disagree 1, Disagree 2, Agree 3, and Strongly Agree 4. The co-op students' means were used as the base to express the magnitude and direction between the two means.

The greatest significant difference (+.31) was established on Item 5b--Working part-time while in high school helps students improve their school attendance with 2.43 mean rating for the co-op students and 2.12 for the non co-op students.

Table 3

Students Working Coop to Working Non-Coop Students

| Item | Non-Coop | Coop | Sig. Diff. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. High school students should have the benefit of holding a paying job before graduating. | 3.46 | 3.58 | +.12 |
| 2. Paid work experience is the best way for high school students to learn what employers expect. | 3.25 | 3.39 | +.14 |
| 3. All high school students should be prepared for the world of work upon graduation. | 3.36 | 3.47 | +.11 |
| 4. High school students learn how to work with others when they work for pay. | 3.07 | 3.29 | +.22 |
| 5. Working part-time while in high school helps students: | | | |
| a. improve their grades. | 2.06 | 2.35 | +.29 |
| b. improve their school attendance. | 2.12 | 2.43 | +.31 |
| c. improve their attitude toward high school. | 2.47 | 2.71 | +.24 |
| d. learn how to improve their money management. | 3.29 | 3.40 | +.11 |
| 6. Working for pay is as valuable as high school course work. | 2.53 | 2.76 | +.23 |
| 7. Academic credit should be awarded for: | | | |
| a. any paid work experience during the school year. | 2.60 | 2.87 | +.27 |
| b. paid work that is supervised by high school personnel. | 2.75 | 2.95 | +.20 |
| 8. Vocational subjects help high school students relate to the world of work. | 3.21 | 3.50 | +.29 |
| 9. Some employers take advantage of students who work part time. | 3.12 | 3.14 | |
| 10. High school students should be allowed to work as many hours as they wish. | 2.57 | 2.71 | +.14 |

Table 3 (Cont'd)

Students Working Coop to Working Non-Coop Students

| Item | | Non-Coop | Coop | Sig. Diff. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. | Working part-time while in high school will: | | | |
| | a. help students remain in school. | 2.34 | 2.63 | +.29 |
| | b. keep students from other school activities. | 2.74 | 2.70 | |
| | c. reduce studying time. | 2.84 | 2.70 | -.14 |
| | d. help pay for school expenses. | 3.23 | 3.22 | |
| | e. give students constructive use of their time. | 3.04 | 3.17 | +.13 |
| | f. provide valuable work experience. | 3.29 | 3.42 | +.13 |
| 12. | Academic subjects help students relate to the world of work. | 2.68 | 2.73 | |
| 13. | High school students should be limited to 20 hours of work each week (including weekends). | 2.28 | 2.25 | |
| 14. | Working more than 20 hours a week will cause high school students' grades to drop. | 2.37 | 2.25 | -.12 |
| 15. | A high school representative should assist students in securing part-time jobs. | 2.69 | 2.81 | +.12 |
| 16. | Handicapped high school students should be provided extra assistance by a high school representative in securing a part-time job. | 3.03 | 3.10 | |
| 17. | Working part-time while in high school helps students: | | | |
| | a. feel better about themselves. | 3.05 | 3.23 | +.18 |
| | b. improve time management. | 3.06 | 3.19 | +.13 |
| | c. become more responsible for their actions. | 3.24 | 3.33 | +.09 |
| | d. appreciate their high school courses. | 2.60 | 2.86 | +.26 |
| | e. make realistic career decisions. | 3.20 | 3.38 | +.18 |
| 18. | High schools should emphasize preparing for college. | 3.49 | 3.38 | -.11 |

Three items had the second highest significant difference (+.29) between the means on:

Item 5a — Working part-time while in high school helps students improve their grades, with 2.35 mean rating for co-op and 2.06 for non co-op.

Item 8 — Vocational subjects help high school students relate to the world of work with 3.50 mean rating for co-op and 3.21 for non co-op.

Item 11 — Working part-time while in high school will help students remain in school, with 2.63 mean rating for co-op and 2.34 for non co-op.

The third greatest significant difference (+.27) was on Item 7a--Academic credit should be awarded for any paid work experience during the school year--with 2.87 mean rating for co-op and 2.60 for non co-op.

The four items with the highest mean rating by the co-op students in descending order are as follows:

Item 1 — High school students should have the benefit of holding a paying job before graduating (3.58).

Item 8 — Vocational subjects help high school students relate to the world of work (3.50).

Item 3 — All high school students should be prepared for the world of work upon graduation (3.47).

Item 2 — Paid work experience is the best way for high school students to learn what employers want (3.39).

The four items with the highest mean rating by the non co-op students in descending order are as follows:

Item 18 — High schools should emphasize preparing for college (3.49).

Item 1 — High school students should have the benefit of holding a paying job before graduating (3.46).

Item 3 — All high school students should be prepared for the world of work upon graduation (3.36).

Item 5d Working part-time while in high school helps students learn how to improve their money management (3.29).

The mean ratings above 3.0 for both groups were found on the following 16 items:

Item 1 High school students should have the benefit of holding a paying job before graduating.

Item 2 Paid work experience is the best way for high school students to learn what employers want.

Item 3 All high school students should be prepared for the world of work upon graduation.

Item 4 High school students learn how to work with others when they work for pay.

Item 5d Working part-time while in high school helps students learn how to improve their money management.

Item 8 Vocational subjects help high school students relate to the world of work.

Item 9 Some employers take advantage of students who work part-time.

Item 11d Working part-time while in high school will help pay for school expenses.

Item 11e Working part-time while in high school will give students constructive use of their time.

Item 11f Working part-time while in high school will provide valuable work experience.

Item 16 Handicapped high school students should be provided extra assistance by a high school representative in securing a part-time job.

Item 17a Working part-time while in high school helps students feel better about themselves.

Item 17b Working part-time while in high school helps students improve time management.

Item 17c Working part-time while in high school helps students become more responsible for their actions.

Item 17e Working part-time while in high school helps students make realistic career decisions.

Item 18 High schools should emphasize preparing for college.

The mean ratings below 2.5 for both groups were found in the following four items:

Item 5a Working part-time while in high school helps students improve their grades.

Item 5d Working part-time while in high school helps students improve their school attendance.

Item 13 High school students should be limited to 20 hours of work each week (including weekends).

Item 14 Working more than 20 hours a week will cause high school students' grades to drop.

## Conclusions

The enhancement of secondary education by part-time work during the school year is greater for the students in a formal cooperative vocational education program than students working without a formal program. As generalizations though, both cooperative vocational education students and non cooperative vocational working students feel that working part-time in high school helps students:

1. Learn what employers expect.
2. Learn how to work with others when they work for pay.
3. Learn how to improve their money management.
4. Pay for school expenses.
5. With constructive use of their time.
6. Gain valuable work experience.
7. Feel better about themselves.
8. Improve time management.
9. Become more responsible for their actions.
10. Make realistic career decisions.

**Both groups** felt working part-time while in high school will not help students:

1. Improve their grades.

2. Improve their school attendance.

In addition, the co-op students had significantly higher mean ratings on the following:

Working part-time while in high school helps students:

a) improve their attitude toward high school.

b) remain in school.

c) appreciate their high school courses.

Further, the **co-op students** had significantly higher mean ratings on the following:

| | |
|---|---|
| Item 1 | High school students should have the benefit of holding a paying job before graduating. |
| Item 2 | Paid work experience is the best way for high school students to learn what employers expect. |
| Item 4 | High school students learn how to work with others when they work for pay. |
| Item 6 | Working for pay is as valuable as high school course work. |
| Item 7a,b | Academic credit should be awarded for any paid work experience during the school year and paid work that is supervised by high school personnel. |
| Item 10 | High school students should be allowed to work as many hours as they wish. |
| Item 8 | Vocational subjects help high school students relate to the world of work. |
| Item 15 | A high school representative should assist students in securing part-time jobs. |
| Item 16 | Handicapped high school students should be provided extra assistance by a high school representative in securing a part-time job. |

The **non co-op students** had significant higher mean ratings on the following:

| | |
|---|---|
| Item 11c | Working part-time while in high school will reduce studying time. |
| Item 13 | High school students should be limited to 20 hours of work each week (including weekends). |

Item 14 Working more than 20 hours a week will cause high school students' grades to drop.

Item 18 High schools should emphasize preparing for college.

The determination of a significant difference in 25 of the 31 items could lead to the generalized conclusion that, overall, the opinions of the two groups experienced differ as measured by the mean ratings. Therefore, it can be concluded that the enhancement of secondary education by students working part-time was greater for those students in a formal cooperative vocational education program.

**Recommendations**

1. A formal program, other than cooperative vocational education, should be implemented to provide an orchestrated delivery of services for students working part-time during the school year by a variety of existing high school staff.
2. A system of guidelines should be developed which would include oversight on employers, the number of hours, and the appropriateness of the hours students could work during the school year.
3. The purposes of a high school education should be examined and changes be implemented to better provide a balance between preparing for the world of work and preparing for college.
4. It needs to be recognized that working part-time in high school is beneficial to the students.
5. It needs to be recognized that working part-time while in high school, without a formal school program such as cooperative vocational education, will not improve the students' grades, school attendance, or probability that students will remain in school.

**Questions for Further Research**

1. To what extent does working part-time assist high school students in being better able to clarify career goals and objectives?
2. To what extent do part-time jobs for high school students have career advancement possibilities?

3. What effect does working part-time during high school have on students entering and completing continuing education programs?

4. To what extent does work experience during high school have on hiring decisions by employers for full-time employment following high school graduation?

5. What activities or changes could a high school implement which would better enable all students to feel better about their high school education?

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